



HEALTHCARE & REHABILITATION AT BRANFORD HILLS

February 27, 2023

Written testimony of Janet Woxland, Administrator of Ark Health Care and Rehabilitation at Branford Hills concerning skilled nursing facility funding for SFY 2024 and SFY 2025.

Members of the Appropriations Committee, my name is Janet Woxland, I am the administrator at Ark Health Care and Rehabilitation at Branford Hills in Branford, CT. I have been the administrator at the facility for 9 years. I started my career as a nurse's aide and moved up the ranks to be a Registered Nurse ultimately gaining my Administrators license. I have over 38 years' experience in the industry. We are a 190-bed, 5 star rated nursing facility, that currently has 163 employees, and we are members of the Connecticut Association of Health Care Facilities. Our facility has been servicing the shoreline community for forty-three years.

Now we are three years into this unrelenting Covid-19 pandemic and Public Health Emergency, and I can say that our nursing facility, the residents & patients we serve, and our employees continue to be challenged like no other time in our history of providing services in Connecticut. I can also say that our nursing facility is as determined as ever to provide excellent care and services, our goal is to exceed the patients and families' expectations.

Never before experienced inflation and the ongoing staffing crisis are the top issues that are not addressed in this budget recommendations.

The realization is that all products and services that are provided in our facilities have been affected by inflation. As an example, last year, we were paying \$38.93 a case for toilet tissue and currently we are paying \$47.25 a case, last year a case of paper towels cost \$59.58 and now they are \$69.25 a case, trash liners were \$36.81 and now are \$43.19 a case. We all have experienced the impact of the soaring food costs this year, which is the same for skilled nursing facilities. To name just a few items: A case of grapes was \$34.00 in 2022 are now \$56.00 a case, diced carrots \$13.00 a case are now \$36.00 a case, Oatmeal in 2022 was \$30.00 for 42oz is now \$58.00, Chicken in 2022 was \$53.00 a box and now is \$92.00. The cost of utilities have gone up dramatically, for example we paid \$6,520.24 1 month for gas in 2022 and now that same month we are paying \$8,134.06 in 2023. An electric bill for 1 month in 2022 was \$3,511.15 and this year the cost is \$4,174.74. for that same month.

The severe staffing shortages our nursing home has faced during the pandemic is not letting up. Based on my years of experience our facility has many times declined admissions which in turn has back logged the hospital due to staffing. Ark has a multi-prong approach to try to hire staffing. We run job fairs, we constantly post ads, we scour Linked-in for candidates and we ask our staff to help us find candidates offering financial incentives in return including referral programs. We have become very creative paying our staff overtime, increased our shift differentials and weekend differentials. We have bonus programs for staff to pick up extra shifts. We offer sign-on bonuses to entice potential new employees.

Additionally, we work collaboratively with nursing schools and act as a clinical site for nursing students in the hope that we will gain nurses from this upon their graduation. We are working with two agencies that train individuals to become nurses' aides, paying for their tuition and books. We have also brought in international nurses from out of the country to ensure our residents are properly cared for.

However, we are competing with staffing agencies who are luring the remaining nurses in the industry from working directly for the facilities and then in turn charging us exorbitant rates in turn for that same nurse, which we are forced to pay. Staffing agencies are charging us as much as \$45-\$50 an hour for a nurses' aide, \$60-\$70 an hour for an LPN and \$85-\$110 an hour for an RN, more than double normative and pre-covid rates.

These rates are unsustainable, yet we are forced to pay them until the ranks of nurses replenish, which is not anticipated until 2027.

Our skilled nursing facility needs more resources to boost pay for our extremely dedicated employees, but the proposed budget doesn't address this issue.

The resources the State Legislator previously provided us with to boost staff pay has made all the difference over the last two years, but our employees are losing ground against inflation, just as we are. More funding is needed in the budget to address the unbelievable inflation we are facing and to help us with our soaring labor costs.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Janet Woxland". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Janet Woxland, RN BSN, Administrator

Ark Health Care & Rehabilitation at Branford Hills